



Survey Finds Citizens Favor Police & Firefighters Paying Share Of Insurance Premiums

By Joey Palacios, Texas Public Radio

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With the ongoing debate between the city and the police and firefighter unions over benefits and healthcare premiums showing no signs of concluding anytime soon, the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce commissioned a telephone survey on the issue.

The survey, conducted for the chamber by a third party, used voter registration information for 501 random phone calls. Participants were asked if they would favor firefighters and police paying for a portion of their healthcare.

They were first asked with little information: 57 percent said they'd favor it. After being more informed of the issue, it jumped to 65 percent in favor. Chamber President Richard Perez said he's not surprised at the response.

"There's no other place or any business that I can think of where their healthcare has been the same for 25 years and that is they've paid: zero," Perez said. "It doesn't exist. It is so odd that it only made sense, for me anyway, that the citizens would be supportive of the need to have them pay."

The discussion on health care benefits is focused on insurance for doctors visits, hospital care, and other general medical needs. In most cases, on-the-job injuries for police and firefighters fall under worker's compensation.

Christopher Steele, president of the San Antonio Professional Firefighters Association, said the city will not always classify an injury under workers comp. He cited one situation where a paramedic injured his arm lifting someone.

"They told my guy, 'You didn't hurt that one the job.' Well, he's got to get surgery," Steele said. "So instead of going through the rigorous process of filing suit, doing all that and going through that process of appealing the worker's comp decision, he just goes under his insurance."

The chamber does not have an official position right now but will likely draft one after speaking with the police and firefighter unions.